would have thought people were supposed to start diving to the floor.

I stopped only for an instant to look over my shoulder to see whom he was calling out. Seeing no one behind me, when I looked ahead again I realized everyone was looking at me. I then remembered I was wearing FAG CLUB emblazoned on my chest like the name of a superhero.

I immediately stepped forward in full control of my location and my presence of mind. I knew this scene must have looked very funny, but I was determined to keep my composure. There were little bursts of laughter here and there but nothing too serious. I glided down the aisles completing my short grocery list and avoiding direct eye contact until I reached the checkout line. There, the clerk looked at my T-shirt and smiled. I smiled back at her, then she turned and began ringing up my groceries.

Just then, the young boy who had shouted, "There's a faggot in the store!" came up to me from the exit of the checkout line. He was a curly-haired, ten-year-old Black boy.

"Hey, Mister, I have a cousin like you. He's gay, too." He continued approaching until he was standing beside me. I looked into his face and saw no fear, no hatred, no disgust.

"Did you get that in Washington?" he asked, pointing to my T-shirt. "My cousin would like one of those."

He was not the least bit shy in telling me this. He looked me directly in the eye, waiting for my response.

"No, I didn't get this in Washington," I told him. "I got it in San Francisco. You can get them there."

"I thought so," he said. "I didn't think you could get a T-shirt like *that* in D.C. I like it. See you!" Then he turned and left.

I stood there momentarily disarmed by his candor and only a little self-conscious about my interaction with him. How we appeared to the others watching us did cross my mind. But then I thought, *If I simply wanted status, I could wear Calvin Klein and strike a pose. That's safe.*

TO BE REAL

The gay life is about affectation, but style is not imagemaking. Style, at best, is an attitude, a reaction to oppression, a way of being perceived as less oppressed, a way of feeling attractive when we are deemed unattractive.

—JOSEPH BEAM
"Making Ourselves from Scratch"

"WHAT BECOMES A LEGEND MOST?"

IN AMERICA, THE SEDUCTIVE ADVERTISING SLOGAN "MEMBERSHIP HAS its privileges" ominously celebrates economic injustice and class and racial oppression. And *Paris Is Burning*, Jenny Livingston's fierce, award-winning documentary on Black gay drag balls, is a window onto a world where the hunger for privilege, dignity, and membership is thought to be satisfied by material possessions.

This, it would seem, is what the disempowered and marginalized dream of having access to and owning when they dream of power, at least in the context of the balls. But these dreams are not particularly unique, they are our common language.

The balls on which Livingston turns her lens feature Black and Latino, mostly poor, gay men—and a few women—mocking and playing out the rituals of a fashion show. The "children," grouped into "houses" of fashion, vie for trophies in the highly competitive balls.

"This is white America," says a voice off camera as ball walkers parade and pose in nautical and grand attire, stylishly stepping to the strains of what sounds like a British coronation march. "When it comes to minorities, especially Blacks," the voice soberly continues, "we, as a people, for